

**Minutes of the Special Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Monday, January 14, 2019, 5:00-6:40 p.m.
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Paul Sagan, Chair, Cambridge (participated via video conference)

James Morton, Vice-Chair, Boston

Katherine Craven, Brookline

Ed Doherty, Boston

Amanda Fernandez, Belmont

Maya Mathews, Student Advisory Council, Newton

Margaret McKenna, Boston

Michael Moriarty, Holyoke

James Peyser, Secretary of Education

Mary Ann Stewart, Lexington

Martin West, Newton

Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Vice-Chair Morton convened the meeting at 5:00 p.m. Members introduced themselves. Vice-Chair Morton noted that Chair Sagan is out of state and is participating via video conference. The Vice-Chair said the Board would take up the New Bedford matter first.

New Bedford Charter School Matters

Commissioner Riley briefed the Board on late-breaking news relating to the expansion request from Alma del Mar Charter School in New Bedford. He said Alma del Mar had requested 1188 seats, which resulted in a spirited debate in New Bedford about charter expansion. Commissioner Riley said a small group from his office, the City of New Bedford, the school district, and the charter school decided to work together to try to come up with a new plan in the best interest of all the students in the city. The Commissioner presented a letter of intent signed by the parties on January 11 that lays out a path forward. He outlined the elements of the letter of intent.

Ms. Craven arrived at 5:05 p.m.

Commissioner Riley said when local leaders collaborate on a solution that they believe is best for their community, he wants to support the initiative. He added that at a time of great polarization, it is heartening to see people come together and work on behalf of students and their families. Commissioner Riley credited Mayor Jon Mitchell, Executive Director Will Gardner, and Superintendent Thomas Anderson for reaching this agreement. The Commissioner added that we need to keep looking for common ground in education, and this is a good example.

Commissioner Riley said while the letter of intent is a critical first step, more work needs to be done at the local level, and legislation is needed to permit this new model. He added that he has begun to engage the Governor, legislative leaders, the Education Committee Co-Chairs, and the New Bedford delegation on this matter. Commissioner Riley said it is always challenging to chart a new course, and when local education and municipal officials come with a joint solution, it is our job at the state level to enable the solution. He said he will ask for the Board's support to move forward with this initiative and he is previewing it this evening to hear initial reactions from members. Commissioner Riley told the Board he will send a memo with more details in the coming days and he hopes representatives from the city, school district, and Alma del Mar will attend the Board's January 22, 2019 regular meeting to discuss this partnership.

Chair Sagan said the Commissioner has kept him informed as this idea has developed. He added this could be a breakthrough moment, noting that the Board supported Jeff Riley's appointment as Commissioner because of his ability to help bridge some of the divides in education. Mr. Doherty asked if the teachers union and parents have been involved in the planning. The Commissioner said he understands that the Mayor has kept various stakeholders aware at the local level, including the teachers union president and the school committee. Mr. Doherty asked if they were involved in the planning and discussion or simply kept aware of it. Commissioner Riley said the Mayor would have those details but he himself spoke recently to state union leadership about the possible agreement. Mr. Doherty said he too would speak with them.

Ms. Stewart asked Commissioner Riley about the legislation needed. Commissioner Riley said it would likely be a Home Rule petition for this type of Commonwealth charter school to go forward. He added that the Administration has signaled it is supportive of this new model. Mr. Moriarty said he is pleased to see this possible compromise and hopes the parties will be able to work out the details for the benefit of children and their families.

Chair Sagan said if this deal does not work out, the Commissioner still has the charter school's expansion request under the current regulations and will be making a recommendation to the Board. Commissioner Riley said that was correct and all options are on the table.

Secretary Peyser arrived at 5:15 p.m.

Redesigned School and District Report Cards

Commissioner Riley said the redesigned school and district report card is intended to meet federal ESSA requirements and give families useful, parent-friendly information about how schools are doing. He said the Department has been working on the new report card with representatives from Learning Heroes, who are at tonight's meeting along with Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston and Associate Commissioner Rob Curtin.

Mr. Johnston gave an overview of the report card information and showed a sample report card from 2017. Mr. Curtin said the Department began the redesign over a year ago, realized we needed a partner to help guide the process, and engaged Learning Heroes, a national organization that provides information and resources for parents to support their children's learning. He introduced Bibb Hubbard, Founder and President, and Erica Gray, of Learning Heroes.

Ms. Hubbard presented background on Learning Heroes, the research they have conducted over the last four years, and examples of organizations, non-profits, and state agencies they have worked with across the U.S. and in Massachusetts. She summarized research on how parents view and understand school data, including the occasional disconnect between parents' perception of their children's academic performance and the reality. She noted that parents value academic and non-academic measures including the quality of the school's learning environment, information on teacher credentials, disciplinary data, and school progress. She added that parents need context for and clear explanations of the data. Ms. Gray described how the Massachusetts parent-friendly report cards were created, using qualitative feedback, recommendations, and communications support.

Mr. Curtin went through a demo version of the updated report card. He said publication is the first step in this process, and the Department will provide guidance to stakeholders, especially parents, about what the data means. Mr. West asked how the school report cards relate to reports that parents receive on their children's MCAS performance. Mr. Curtin said he plans to share the lessons learned from the report card redesign project with the Student Assessment Office.

Ms. McKenna said she expected the heading "student engagement" to cover issues other than student attendance and discipline. Ms. Fernandez concurred. Mr. Curtin said the Department would reconsider the terminology, and in the future would do more around reporting on student engagement. Ms. Mathews asked about resources for parents. Ms. Gray said the first step is to get the information posted and then help parents engage with their children's teachers. Ms. McKenna commented that the section on academic opportunities and the percentage of students participating could help parents determine if their children are taking advantage of available opportunities in school.

In response to a question from Mr. Moriarty, Mr. Curtin said the Department will continue to publish school and district profiles. Secretary Peyser commented on the finance data, noting that parents may be more interested in how a school or district is using funds rather than in the funding source. Mr. Curtin said the finance section will develop further over time. Vice-Chair Morton thanked the panel and said the project is off to a fantastic start.

Update on Automated Test Scoring

Commissioner Riley introduced Deputy Commissioner Jeff Wulfson, Associate Commissioner Michol Stapel, and Bob Lee, Chief MCAS Analyst, to report on the Department's ongoing study of automated test scoring. Deputy Commissioner Wulfson said this is an update on the topic last discussed with the Board in May 2018. He said using computer-assisted scoring for MCAS English Language Arts essays in grades 3-8 could enable faster reporting of test results to students, parents, and schools, and also open up opportunities for computer adaptive testing in the future. Mr. Wulfson said the Department is taking time to evaluate the potential of automated test scoring before deciding if it is right for Massachusetts; the key question is whether it is as reliable as, or more reliable than, our current system of human scoring. He said there have been remarkable advances in artificial intelligence recently, and because a number of states have already moved to automated scoring, we can learn from their experience.

Ms. Stapel presented an overview of current scoring of MCAS ELA essays and open response questions, explained how scoring reliability is defined, and described the automated scoring process. She discussed the automated scoring analyses on the Next-Generation MCAS in 2017 and 2018, the pilot research on one MCAS grade 5 essay from 2017, and the results from the 2018 study of automated essay scoring. Mr. Doherty asked if at this point, automated scoring appears to be as valid and reliable as human scorers. Deputy Commissioner Wulfson and Ms. Stapel said based on the findings so far, the answer is yes. Ms. Craven asked about possible cost savings related to automated scoring. Deputy Commissioner Wulfson said cost is not the driving factor because there are many variables, including start-up costs. Ms. Stewart asked who is advising on this project. Ms. Stapel said the Department is working with the MCAS test contractor, who provided initial analyses, as well as with our technical advisory committee.

In response to a question from Secretary Peyser about potential time savings, Deputy Commissioner Wulfson said machine scoring would allow a much quicker turnaround. He said the goal is to return MCAS scores to schools by the end of the school year to help inform student placements and instructional decisions for the fall. Ms. Stapel concluded by reviewing next steps for 2019 and beyond. In response to a question from Mr. Moriarty, she said about 15-20 other states are using automated scoring and while some moved into it too quickly, most have been successful. Deputy Commissioner Wulfson said the Department will continue its review and will update the Board again in the fall.

Vice Chair Morton thanked the panel for the presentation.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 6:40 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
and Secretary to the Board